

Volunteer Recruitment

How to Plan your Recruitment

Planning for the recruitment of volunteers is a necessary requirement in finding the right volunteers for your organisation. This section considers the process you need to go through to find the best volunteers for your organisation.

Before advertising for volunteers make sure that you have created a volunteer role description so that volunteers are clear about their role and what support they can expect. You will have already decided on the qualities, skills, attitudes and interests that you would want from potential volunteers and what volunteers will be involved.

Before recruiting for a volunteer role you should consider:

- Who is going to be responsible for recruiting volunteers?
- How many volunteers would you like to recruit?
- How and where will you advertise opportunities?
- What recruitment methods will you use (application forms, interviews etc)?
- What will you do if someone is unsuitable for the role?
- How and when will references be taken up?
- What roles if any will require DBS checks?
- When should recruitment take place? One volunteer at a time - which would mean an ongoing recruitment, or in groups once, twice or four times a year – what is most useful to you as an organisation?

Marketing your Volunteer Opportunities

Marketing your recruitment is about getting your recruitment message across to individuals who might want to volunteer. Think about what your organisation can offer a volunteer. Try and think of something that can grab people's attention, gain their interest and prompt them to become involved. Keep the message simple. Make sure it reflects the nature of the volunteering opportunity. Design posters and leaflets which are eye catching and accessible, avoiding jargon. Make sure marketing materials include the details of who to contact in the organisation.

Where to advertise

There are a number of different ways of advertising for volunteers.

- Posters / flyers in libraries, doctor surgeries, public buildings, schools/colleges, leisure centres, places of worship, arts venues, supermarkets, and cafes.
- Adverts
- Newsletters (hard copy and electronic)
- Word of mouth through existing volunteers, staff or service users
- Internet – your own website / social networking sites including Twitter and Facebook
- Events / exhibitions - look out for places that you can hold a stall that will help publicise your organisation and meet potential volunteers.
- Use your own communication (e.g. website, newsletter, poster)
- Use the local press
- Giving talks at career fairs, or group meetings (e.g. Rotary, WI), having a stall at community events etc.
- Volunteering Northumberland – advertising your vacancy on our website is free.

Timing

It is possible to recruit all year round. However, it is worth noting that there are key times throughout the year when there are more volunteers looking for opportunities.

- New Year - a very popular time when lots of people may be looking for a fresh start or making a positive change for the upcoming year.
- Volunteers Week - In the first week of June. This is a very high profile time, when there are often lots of news stories about volunteering. A good time to approach the media with some good news stories!

Follow up

As soon as a volunteer contacts the organisation, make sure that you get back in contact with them promptly. Decide who is going to be responsible for contacting the volunteers and make sure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the roles.

Selecting Volunteers

Selecting volunteers is about finding a good match between the prospective volunteer and the volunteer role on offer. It is an attempt to find a person who has the right skills, experience and enthusiasm whose needs and interests will be satisfied by the opportunity. The selection process you adopt will depend on your organisation and the work that volunteers undertake within it. For instance, volunteers with a higher degree of responsibility can expect to go through a more detailed selection process. All organisations need to establish a system that will suit their needs and reflect the role that the volunteer will do and the culture / work of the organisation. Small groups may decide to just have an informal chat, whilst larger organisations may want a more formal structure for their interview process.

Always bear in mind that it might take some time to find the right volunteers for your organisation – not everyone will be right. If volunteers are unsuitable for their chosen opportunities and it is not possible to find them an alternative, you should be honest. Rather than focusing on the negative, highlight their skills and qualities and direct them to their nearest volunteer centre.

Record keeping

It is important as a minimum to keep basic records of volunteers, including:

- The volunteer's name and address, with some proof of identity
- Contact details
- Details of their next-of-kin or an emergency contact
- Information about any medical conditions or allergies which their manager and/or colleagues might need to know about

Application forms

You might want to ask a volunteer to complete a basic application form. This gives a potential volunteer an opportunity to tell you something about themselves and their reasons for volunteering, and will provide you with a basic personnel record. Application forms need to be kept simple. Only ask questions that are relevant and state what you will do with the information provided and how you will use it. If applicable you should state that a Disclosure and Barring Check will be required.

Interviewing Volunteers / Meeting with applicants

The word 'interview' can be very off-putting and unless you need to conduct a formal interview, the term 'come in for a chat' or 'come in to talk' is better to use it is more likely to put potential volunteers at ease. Interviews/ chats give you the opportunity to tell the potential volunteer more about the role and the organisation, and to answer any questions they have. It's also an opportunity to see if they are suitable for the role. The meetings are as much about the volunteer finding out about you, as they are about you finding out about them. It gives the volunteers a chance to decide whether your organisation is the right one for them, thus saving everyone's time.

Planning an interview

It is much better to plan your interview carefully in advance because a badly conducted interview will put volunteers off. In your interview you may wish to cover the following areas:

- What attracted them to your organisation
- What they have been doing for the previous year or two
- What they hope to gain from volunteering
- What, if any relevant skills, knowledge, experience and interests they have
- Their availability
- Any resources they will need, for example an induction loop etc.

It is important to draw up a list of questions in advance based on the volunteer task description. Try to use open questions. As an interviewer, you should be doing more listening than talking (except when giving information).

If you are interviewing several volunteers, you may need to take notes. Explain to the volunteer why you are making notes, just in case they think they have said something wrong.

If you are not going to make a decision during the interview, then tell the volunteer when you will let them know and whether they can get feedback on their interview.

References

Most organisations will ask volunteers to provide two references. This is essential especially when the organisation works with vulnerable people, for example: children, older people, those with a learning disability etc. In these situations asking for a reference from a friend or family member may not be appropriate, whereas a reference from a previous employer, tutor or teacher would be ideal. Be aware that providing references may be difficult for those who have been unemployed for a long period of time or young people who have limited work experience. When requesting references, be clear about what information you require, such as reliability, punctuality, honesty, etc.

You need to decide if you want references in writing or would accept telephone references.

If using a telephone reference make a checklist of questions to ask and to keep a written record of points raised in telephone references, especially if the reference is unsatisfactory.

The questions asked, whether verbally or in writing, should verify how long the person has known the volunteer, and for how long, and should ask specific questions which relate to the task description and required skills for the role the volunteer will be performing. You might also want to ask whether the referee would have any concerns or doubts about offering the person this role.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks

For volunteer roles that involve regular contact with children or vulnerable adults (e.g. those with mental health problems, the elderly, or people with learning disabilities), a volunteer screening process and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks may be required.

A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check provides information about a volunteer's criminal history. It helps volunteer involving organisations determine whether a person is a suitable candidate for the role for which they are applying.

Further information is available from the Home Office website:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/agencies-public-bodies/crb>

Turning a Volunteer Down

You do not have to accept every person who offers to volunteer for your organisation. The best way to handle this issue is to let the volunteer know that you appreciate their offer and explain why you are unable to accept. Be as honest as you can and, if possible, suggest another organisation which might be more suitable or refer them to volunteering opportunities promoted on Northumberland CVA website - <http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk/>

Remember, accepting someone who is not suitable will probably be more difficult in the long run than clearly saying "no" to begin with.

If you are not quite sure about a volunteer, but they meet the criteria, or if they do not quite fit the criteria but you decide you can give some extra support, you may decide to accept them but to carefully monitor and supervise their role. Having an introductory period for all volunteers helps you and the volunteer to review their progress after a fixed period. If you do decide to have an introductory period, this should apply to all the volunteers that you recruit and it should be made clear to people at the interview.

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